

Date: December 19, 2011

To: Thomas J. Bonfield, City Manager
Through: Theodore L. Voorhees, Deputy City Manager
From: Rhonda B. Parker, Director, Department of Parks and Recreation
Subject: Update on Maintenance Activities at Old North Durham Park

Executive Summary

The City acquired the 3.58 acres that comprise Old North Durham Park (OND Park) in 1993 from the Durham Public Schools. Since that date, the City has funded some minor upgrades and renovations on the site, and the adjacent school has donated a playground to the park. Staff from the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) have hosted a series of public meetings since 2004, some by the department alone and some jointly with other organizations, to try to determine the best ways in which to develop the park. One continuing issue has been storm water drainage problems in the park; that issue will be addressed by work to be undertaken by Public Works (PW) in spring 2012. DPR is proposing to use \$99,250.00, the proceeds from the sale of the final parcel of the former Erwin Field Park, to make renovations to the park after the work by PW is completed; those renovations will not significantly impact the character or uses of the park.

Recommendation

Staff recommends that City Council receive this report on OND Park including maintenance activities planned for 2012. Additionally, staff has prepared a resolution based on the substantive points of a draft resolution submitted by Council Member Schewel and subsequent discussion at the January 5, 2012, work session. Adoption of the staff prepared resolution is recommended.

Background

The City received the 3.58 acres of land that currently comprises OND Park in 1993 from the Durham Public Schools; it was mitigation property for an LWCF-encumbered park that was sold to the school system for the new Eastway Elementary School. In 2005, the Council accepted the neighboring Central Park School for Children's (CPSC) donation of playground equipment for the park (Resolution #9281) and at the same time directed DPR staff to maintain a "full size" athletic field in the park because our City park portfolio of athletic fields was then very limited (Attachments A and B). The site elements adopted at that meeting in 2005 have determined the management of the park to date.

In 2007, after one series of public meetings held in conjunction with the Old North Durham Neighborhood Association (ONDA), the City proposed to lease OND Park to CPSC, with the clear provision that the school always keep the park open to the public, so that the school could make additional renovations to the site and take on additional maintenance. However, there were neighbors who expressed a concern that the school would "take over" the park and

make some groups of park users feel unwelcome. They voiced these concerns at the City Council work session and at a follow-up meeting with DPR staff; as a result, DPR dropped this idea and has continued to work with different stakeholders in the neighborhood.

In 2010, a group of stakeholders including CPSC, representatives from the Old North Durham and the Five Points neighborhoods, and businesses in the Central Park district proposed a master plan that shows a smaller athletic field remaining in the park, with a walking trail, some storm water management green areas, and a community garden, among other ideas; and they suggested fund-raising possibilities to implement those. They held a series of meetings to try to garner as much public input as possible. DPR brought that proposal to the Council for consideration as a new plan for the park in October, 2010. Some groups of other park stakeholders objected to that proposal, and the Council directed DPR to hold additional public meetings to determine more clearly what park plans would meet most citizen needs.

In spring, 2011, DPR co-hosted a series of three public meetings on plans for OND Park with a group of stakeholders that had organized themselves into an affiliation named the “Friends of Old North Durham Park.” Though these meetings ultimately proved to be rather contentious, they were all advertised and open to the public, and staff did receive some clear input on a wide range of ideas of how different park users wanted to see the park developed and maintained. During spring 2011, as well, the City’s Recreation Advisory Commission (RAC) made its recommendation to the Council on OND Park, based on some of its members’ attendance at these meetings and a presentation by the Durham Coalition for Urban Justice (DCUJ) to the RAC. DPR hosted another public meeting on November 16, 2011 (Attachment C).

The recommendations from DPR for maintenance and management of OND Park are based on this long history of park user input, staff observations of park use, National Recreation and Park Association recommendations on best practices in park development, the physical opportunities and constraints of the site, and the proposed project budget.

Issues/Analysis

There are several issues that any management regimen for OND Park must address:

Storm water and drainage – this issue has been a key obstacle to park upkeep. The work proposed for spring 2012 by PW’s Storm Water unit should solve some longtime problems and allow for some park renovations (Attachments D and E). Replacement of storm water lines will require removal of some trees in the park—these are trees near the end of their anticipated life spans—and so part of the renovation work will be re-planting. One goal of the DPR renovations will be to keep uses that can negatively impact storm drain lines away from the new lines.

Park uses – because the Old North Durham neighborhood immediately around the park is very diverse—it includes CPSC, TROSA, apartments, single family homes, and small businesses—there is a diversity of functions that users want the park to offer. DPR recommends keeping a field area in the park to be used for both athletics and community events. The central open area available for use can be kept open and seeded with Bermuda grass. DPR staff anticipate that these renovations will follow the PW work immediately, to minimize the park down time for users. The likely configuration of that open space after the PW repairs should allow a sports field at least as large as 300 feet by 160 feet to be lined out on the site as different users need it. Bermuda grass should tolerate full sun and continued heavy use better than most other grasses, but any natural surface will become worn under those conditions. Any improvements

made to OND Park will be reviewed by City staff for conformance with requirements for accessibility and safety and for building code and UDO compliance.

Agenda item of 2005

In 2005, the City Council accepted by resolution #9281 a donation of playground equipment for the park from CPSC. An additional part of that 2005 decision included five tasks for DPR to accomplish with regard to OND Park: (1) retain a field 330 feet by 180 feet in the park, (2) keep the new playground open to the public, (3) acquire an access from TROSA for pedestrian access to the park, (4) improve the pedestrian access off Foster St., and (5) investigate the possibility of a portable restroom in the park.

1. In 2005, there was a need to keep OND Park in the system as a soccer field DPR could rent for programmed play, since the system was short of fields that could handle adult games. Since 2005, the City has added three fields at Herndon Park, two fields at Old Chapel Hill Rd. Park, and one field at Holton Resource Center into the system. There are also two shared use fields with DPS, with two more coming on line this fall, and an Interlocal Agreement that allows access to more school facilities. The two ball fields at Rock Quarry Park have been converted for soccer use as well. A field used for programmed play typically needs associated parking, associated restrooms, possibly sports lighting, and some level of turf protection. Athletic fields that DPR uses for programmed play are closed for maintenance in mid-summer and winter and are not used for other events to protect the turf and any installed irrigation. Some are even fenced. Without the pressure of necessity, this type of field does not seem as suitable for a neighborhood park with multiple open space uses. However, fields used for soccer, even soccer for adults, have a range of acceptable dimensions, from 180 x 120 feet for a "medium" field to 300 x 210 feet for a "large" field; so an open space in the park to serve a variety of non-programmed athletic uses is quite possible.

The new storm drainage lines will require moving the "edges" of the site in from their current configuration so that there will be no trees or uses on top of the lines themselves (Attachments F and G). The remaining OND Park open space will allow a sports field as large as 300 feet by 160 feet to be lined out on the site as different users need it, while still maintaining the flexibility for different community uses. The proposed replacement trees serve all park users, including soccer spectators. If funding allows the installation of a water line into the park from Foster St., above ground irrigation is possible for the site with a traveling sprinkler system.

2. The playground donated by CPSC is open to the public. This 2005 agenda item does stipulate keeping a 100 foot buffer between the playground and any athletic field in the park.
3. An access has been acquired from the Triangle Residence Options for Substance Abusers (TROSA) from W. Geer St. into the park. Assuming the available funding is adequate, staff would like to improve both this access and the access from Foster St. into the park to make them more obvious, inviting, and usable by the public.
4. See number 3 above; the Foster St. access would also be the location of a water line into the park, if possible, and subsequently be paved. A water line would make a water fountain and potentially irrigation of the turf possible.

5. In order to access it for regular cleaning and servicing, a portable toilet would need to be placed adjacent to the maintenance vehicle access into the park. This location would be difficult to make ADA compliant.

Community buy-in – during the several years of discussion about this park, the various stakeholder groups: ONDA, DCUJ, FONDP, have become somewhat polarized. Given the lack of overall community agreement, DPR's planned renovations do not attempt to make significant changes in the park; rather, the renovations will bring the park into good condition after the PW storm drain repairs and serve the observed and stated goals of as many stakeholders as possible with the limited project budget. In the future, other upfits are possible as the stakeholder groups reach some agreements. In the future as well, the City may choose to seek grant funding such as the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARTF) to assist with these improvements.

Alternatives

The City Council could choose not to accept this report and direct staff to prepare some different recommendations.

Financial Impact

Public Works has estimated that its renovations to the storm drainage system in the park should cost approximately \$100,000.00; an exact amount will not be available until engineered drawings are completed and accepted. DPR has requested that the \$99,250.00 received from Duke University for the purchase of the smaller parcel of the former Erwin Field Park be allocated to the repair work in OND Park following the storm drainage project.

SDBE Summary

Any work contracted by the City for this project will be in compliance with the Ordinance to Promote Equal Business Opportunities in City Contracting.

Attachments:

- A. City Council Resolution #9281
- B. Pages 19 and 20, City Council Minutes, September 6, 2005
- C. Presentation at the public meeting, November 16, 2011
- D. Existing conditions (Public Works)
- E. Proposed Renovations Schematic Design (Public Works)
- F. Comparison of existing and proposed conditions within park dimensions
- G. Soccer Field Sizes, Fédération Internationale de Football Association, 2010-2011

